

SUBMISSION
TO
THE ROYAL COMMISSION
ON
THE GREAT SLAVE LAKE RAILWAY
ON BEHALF OF
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

PRESENTED BY
HONOURABLE GORDON E. TAYLOR
MINISTER OF HIGHWAYS

S U B M I S S I O N

Honourable Mr. Justice M. D. Manning,
Chairman, and Members of
The Royal Commission on the Great Slave Lake Railway.

Sirs:

I appreciate the privilege of appearing before you to make representations on behalf of the Government of Alberta on the route of the railway through the northern part of this province.

The government of this province believes it is important to the future development of northern Alberta and to the Northwest Territories that a railway, so located as to best serve this objective, be constructed at an early date.

Well over four years ago the Alberta Government made representations to the Federal Government urging the construction of a railway from Grimshaw to Pine Point. This was followed by an offer of free right-of-way for the line.

On or about May 1, 1958 when the Federal Government was having difficulty in making a decision on the route, the Honourable E. C. Manning, Premier of Alberta, wrote to the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, in part, as follows:

"For a number of years the Alberta Government has made strong representations urging the construction of a railway from Grimshaw north for the purpose of serving the interests of Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. As a matter of fact, last year we offered to provide free right-of-way through Crown lands north of Grimshaw in order to facilitate a decision to commence a railway"

Since it appeared that some contribution would be made towards the cost of the construction of this railway by the Canadian Government on behalf of the people of Canada, the Government of Alberta felt that every effort should be made to ensure that the greatest possible continuing benefits would accrue to the people of Canada.

In this vein, Premier Manning concluded his letter to the Prime Minister as follows:

"We do strongly recommend though that your Government and the railways concerned carry out exhaustive studies of all economic, engineering and other relevant factors before you finally accept any route, in order that the best interests of the people of the Peace River area and the Northwest Territories for the present and future may be served."

It is in this same spirit that we submit this Brief to your Commission today which shows the reasons why we favour the route from Grimshaw north.

Economic Factors of the Grimshaw Route

If the railways were paying the full cost of the construction on a private enterprise basis, then the economic factors would probably be the determining factors. Even when the railways are being subsidized however the economic factors must be carefully evaluated.

The following points should be noted:

(1) The terms of reference to your Commission as outlined in the newspaper advertisement inviting submissions reads, as follows:

"Inquire into and report upon the respective merits of the alternative routes which might be followed by a railway line to be built from Northern Alberta into the Southern portion of the District of Mackenzie, Northwest Territories, for the purpose of providing access to and contributing to the development of that portion of the Territories tributary to Great Slave Lake."

It is noted that the purpose of the railway is to provide access to and contribute to the development of the Great Slave Lake area.

A railway from Grimshaw can accomplish this objective. The haul of goods and materials and minerals from that area would be equal to the total hauled via any other route.

(2) The Provincial Department of Lands and Forests has issued the following table:

Net Timber Volume of the Grimshaw Area

Volume Information	Total Volume	1958 Fire Loss	Net Volume
F. B. M. - coniferous	10,488,792,000	87,982,000	10,400,810,000
coniferous	45,112,400	801,500	44,310,900
Cords deciduous	78,743,300	221,700	78,521,600
Total	123,855,700	1,023,200	122,832,500

It will be noted that there are now ten billion board feet of coniferous saw timber and 44 million cords of coniferous pulpwood in the Grimshaw area which is defined as the area lying north of Grimshaw and west of the Wood Buffalo Park to the British Columbia boundary.

(3) Close to one-half million acres adjacent to the Grimshaw route are already in farms with over 261,500 acres improved and 14,800 acres in pasture.

The Royal Commission on the Development of Northern Alberta in dealing with the Grimshaw line (on page 94) stated:

"This railroad would traverse the best agricultural land that remains in the north."

The freight engendered by agriculture is an important factor in determining the economics of a railway line.

(4) The oil and gas and industrial potential in the western area are factors worthy of note.

It is submitted that the diversified economy of the Grimshaw area offer economic considerations.

Engineering Factors

Engineering factors are also of major importance as the lower the capital costs can be kept the sooner the line will be paid for and

the more attractive will be the tariffs and the rate of return on the investment. From an engineering point of view there are a number of prime factors which should determine which route is the most applicable.

I General Factors on the Cost of Construction on the Grimshaw Route

Of primary importance is the matter of the cost of construction which involves the length, terrain, type of soil, easy accessibility, river crossings and other geographical features.

(a) With reference to the cost of construction, it is noted that Grimshaw lies almost directly south of Pine Point and this directness of route would be a factor of prime consideration.

(b) Terrain: The Highways Department through its intensive investigation and construction of the Mackenzie Highway has proven data on its files with respect to the type of terrain a railway line would traverse. It has been found that in general, the country is very flat and that very few serious muskeg problems would be encountered. Drainage conditions, of course, are not as satisfactory as one would find in more rolling country; however, adequate drainage can be achieved at reasonable cost. There are relatively few areas in which excessively heavy excavation quantities would be involved.

(c) Type of Soil: The soil type is generally of a clay nature which, of course, is preferable for embankment construction. The location from Grimshaw to Pine Point would travel through soil of this type for a much greater distance than any other line built from the east, as the rocky Canadian Shield is much further north along this suggested line. The costs of construction are very greatly increased where rock formations are encountered.

(d) Easy Accessibility: The easy accessibility to construction, results in the lowering of transport costs of men and materials to and from the project, and this has an effect on the costs of construction.

At present, the Mackenzie Highway would make any portion of a proposed railway line from Grimshaw to Pine Point very easily accessible along its entire route. The railway line could, therefore, be constructed simultaneously along its whole length with the simple expediency of short access roads from the Mackenzie Highway to the railway right of way. No other location could be chosen which would enable the builders of a railway line to obtain such easy and cheap access to all points of the line during the construction period.

(e) River Crossings: In order to reduce construction costs, the crossing of large rivers and other bodies of water must of course, be kept to a minimum. It is noted that crossings are not required on this route over the Athabasca River, the Peace River or the Slave River. Other crossings are relatively small.

II Factors in the Cost of Operation on the Grimshaw Route

Another important factor is the cost of operation which will involve maintenance costs, line gradients and fuel costs.

(a) Maintenance Costs: In order to avoid excessive maintenance costs the railway line should have adequate drainage with a minimum of snow, flood and slide clearings. The more stable the ground upon which such a railway is built the closer these objectives are achieved. The Grimshaw route to Pine Point has relatively attractive features in this regard. Drainage problems encountered by highway construction have been solved without any great difficulty and the snow conditions on a relatively high graded roadway are such that construction can eliminate much of the snow drifting. The Grimshaw route also avoids the Peace River valley which is highly susceptible to slides. Our studies and experiences indicate that this entire valley is susceptible to sliding conditions and it has only been through the expenditures of very large sums of money

that the Department of Highways has been able to cope with these conditions at the Dunvegan and Peace River crossings. It appears that any other crossing of this valley will require similar expenditures.

(b) Line Gradients: Our studies indicate that very low gradients can be secured along the entire route from Grimshaw to Pine Point. Consequently, there would be no excessively steep grades and faster schedules and reduced maintenance would result.

(c) The cost of fuel to any railway line is, of course, of prime importance, and as the railways have dieselized their tractive units advantage could be taken of the nearness of the Grimshaw route to the refineries already established in the Peace River area.

The engineering factors are relatively attractive along the Grimshaw route.

The Potential

A railway must have some assurance of a long time operation. An investment reaching the proportion that this one will, must be positively assured of continuing business for many years to come.

We submit that the potential on the Grimshaw route is one of definite promise for the future.

(1) As referred to previously the report of the Royal Commission on the Development of Northern Alberta (page 94) stated that "the proposed Grimshaw line..... would substantially lower transportation costs (for the area). This railway would traverse the best agricultural land that remains in the north."

The haulage of agricultural production and products required for the operation of modern agriculture can be reasonably expected to provide an ever-increasing volume of traffic for a considerable time to come.

The following table gives some indication of the agricultural potential of the area involved.

ESTIMATES OF LAND AVAILABLE FOR
AGRICULTURE ON THE UPPER PEACE

<u>Classification of Agricultural Land</u>				
<u>Improvement District</u>	<u>In Farms 1956</u>	<u>Arable</u>	<u>Doubtful Arable</u>	<u>Pasture and Woodland</u>
- a c r e s -				
No. 138	377,687	320,000	Nil	286,000
No. 144	Nil	Nil	22,000	2,791,000
No. 145	1,484	1,013,000	791,000	2,246,000
No. 146	16,425	622,000	113,000	4,520,000
Total	395,596	1,955,000	926,000	9,843,000
147 & 149*	99,957	500,000	-	1,000,000
Total	495,553	2,455,000	926,000	10,843,000

* Present plans are to complete an aerial survey of the Fort Vermilion and Hay Lakes districts this summer, and detailed land classification data will not be available until late next winter. The figures shown here are considered to be conservative guesses.

It appears that a possible total of two million acres of arable land may be occupied in the future. In addition, in excess of ten million acres is available for pasture and woodland.

A railway would not only derive business from the present settlement but it would enhance and encourage further settlement.

(2) Reference has already been made to the timber potential.

(3) The population of the area will increase substantially in the years ahead.

(4) The present development of the Peace River area envisions further development such as refineries, scrubbing plants, petro chemical industries, smelter plants, meat packing plants, flour mills, food and dairy processing plants.


The Most Important Factor of All

No one will deny that all factors are important. There is, however, one very basic factor that cannot be ignored. It might be termed the end objective of the entire enterprise, or the most important factor of all. I refer to the sociological or human factor.

Is the primary objective of this railway to open up new country in order to exploit the mineral wealth thereof or is it to serve settlements of people? That is the question. It may well be that your recommendation to the Government of Canada will hinge directly on your answer to this question.

The route from Waterways clearly exemplifies the first point of view, namely, to build the railway in order that great mineral wealth may be exploited. It is one logical and natural point of view. No one can successfully argue that the close proximity of such a railway line to the Canadian Shield would not be a tremendous boost and advantage in opening up this potentially rich mineral area.

The route from Grimshaw exemplifies the other point of view, namely, that a railroad primarily should be built to serve the present and future populated areas. While subscribing to this view, the Government of Alberta does not thereby imply that the other concept is without merit. Both should be fully and impartially considered and the final decision should be based on an unbiased assessment of the evidence indicating which of the two routes will bring the greatest measure of benefit to the largest number of people.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from

Legislative Assembly of Alberta - Alberta Legislature Library